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SUBJECT: CLEANSING THE VOTER REGISTER -- STRONGER SOAP  
NEEDED

REF: ACCRA 1169

¶1. (U) SUMMARY. More than 2,000 polling stations throughout Ghana opened on October 5 to give parties and citizens the opportunity to challenge the eligibility of registrants. As the week set aside for this process draws to a close, the response has been totally underwhelming. For all of the expressed concern about bloated voter rolls and the importance of removing ineligible voters to assure the integrity of the December 7 election, the electorate and parties have reacted to this exercise with a collective yawn.  
END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Ghana's voter registration exercise ended August 13 with charges and countercharges that Ghana's two major parties had inflated voter rolls by registering minors and foreigners and double-registering eligible voters in their respective strongholds. The Electoral Commission (EC) admitted that the registration process had been flawed, with a credibility-defying 290% increase in new registrants compared to a similar exercise in 2006. The EC pledged to correct inconsistencies by opening the voter registers at each polling station October 5-11 to allow citizens themselves to examine registers at the most local levels and challenge any voter they deemed to be ineligible.

¶3. (U) Embassy Poloff and USAID Democracy and Governance Officer visited approximately 20 polling stations in Greater Accra on Sunday afternoon, the first day of the exhibition, and then revisited several of those stations on Wednesday afternoon. Casual workers, mostly in their 20s, manned the stations, which generally consisted of a small table under a tree in a school yard. Most had received 3 days of training from the EC. All had the requisite materials: a registration booklet with name, age, photo, and voter ID number for voters at their polling stations, along with forms for those without a voter ID card and forms for challenging the eligibility of registrants.

¶4. (U) All poll workers reported very low turnout, about 10-15%. Almost all voters showed up only to check that their names were on the register. Emboffs observed several instances where voters were told that they were not on the register and likely had come to the wrong polling station. Other than two instances where voters pointed out that a relative was no longer living, not a single challenge had been leveled. POL Section's LES Political Specialist traveled to the contested Volta Region during the exhibition, and reported even lower turnout. Media reports and other NGO election observers had the same findings. The Carter Center's long term observers filed similar reports from the two swing regions, Central and Brong Ahafo.

¶5. (U) Party response to the low turnout has thus far been muted. The EC has been equally silent. Media reports on the low turnout have been steady, but low-key and laconic.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT. In light of their strong protestations of the need to cleanse voter rolls, the silence of the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) about the low turnout is hard to read. Both parties profess to be certain of victory, and each party may be awaiting election results for the losing party to seize upon the bloated rolls as a reason to protest the election's validity. The EC continues to hold that there will be no problem on election day despite their earlier claim that the exhibition period would be vital for authenticating legitimate voters.

¶7. (SBU) The bloated register does not necessarily indicate widespread fraud. Many Ghanaians use their voter card as their primary means of identification in the absence of any other national identification card. It is a widely held notion that some double registrations occur solely for the purpose of obtaining a second ID card. The low turnout for the exhibition, however, presents a larger concern: on election day, those who did not verify their name and correct polling place will not find their names on the register and will be denied the right to vote. This could lead to delays, arguments, longer queues, and accusations of incompetence and fraud on the part of the EC. Failure of the police to solve problems or keep peace at the polling stations would likely redound upon the ruling NPP. END COMMENT

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